

## Lesson #5: Lesson Plans for *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir*

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### **MAPPING MY FAMILY'S JOURNEY**

Using the tools below as a guide, construct a map that illustrates your family's immigration journey. It would be similar to Reyna Grande's map.

Example: [http://www.travellerspoint.com/member\\_map.cfm#/map/23559](http://www.travellerspoint.com/member_map.cfm#/map/23559)

Main link: [http://www.travellerspoint.com/member\\_map.cfm](http://www.travellerspoint.com/member_map.cfm)

## **THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US: A MEMOIR READING GUIDE**

### **Chapters 1 - 4 / Book One**

**A. Read the dedication and the quotation. On the following page, read the quotation from renowned American poet Carl Sandburg.**

1. Why do you think the book is dedicated to that person?  
*(Keep the dedication in mind after you read the book and come back to this question after you finish it)*
2. What do the quotations mean? What is Reyna Grande saying? What is her message to her readers?
3. What is a prologue?
4. Read the first three paragraphs of the prologue for Book One. What device or technique does Grande use to introduce her memoir? What is more powerful than La Llorona and why?
5. Read page 4 of the prologue. What do we learn about the impact of El Otro Lado and what emotions for Reyna Grande can you discern in that passage? How does it make *you* feel?

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**B. Notice that the memoir is divided into two books: *Mi Mamá Me Ama* (My mother loves me) and “The Man Behind the Glass” (p. 162).**

1. Why do you think Reyna Grande has given section one that title? How do her mother’s actions seem to contradict this?
2. Read page 5 and the top of page 6 which ends with “. . .if truth be told, I never really got my mother back.” Explain what Reyna Grande means by this.
3. Have you ever had relatives like the ones Reyna Grande had? How did they treat you?
4. After reading these four chapters, what is your reaction?

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### **Chapters 5 – 8 / Book One**

1. Significant incidents occurred the year Reyna turned five. What were they and what impact did they have on her?
2. How do immigrants who return to Mexico contribute to the golden mythology of El Otro Lado?
3. How does poverty affect Reyna and her siblings? What injustices do they suffer?
4. What is Reyna's educational experience?
5. The Grande children receive a package from their parents. But, how does this gift contribute to their feelings of neglect?
6. Why does Reyna call her father "the Man Behind the Glass?" What does this imply about their relationship? How does Reyna communicate the distance between them?
7. How does immigration affect the Mexican state of Guerrero and what are the experiences of Reyna's father who goes in search of his dream?
8. What themes do you encounter in these chapters?

## ***THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US: A MEMOIR READING GUIDE***

### **Chapters 9 – 12 / Book One**

#### **Chapter 9**

1. What is the correlation between poverty and health for the Grande children?
2. What is the significance of the construction of the house for them?
3. What is the significance of “Mi Mamá Me Ama” for Reyna?
4. How does Reyna convey the importance of a mother in Ch. 9?

#### **Chapter 10**

1. Discuss the following passage: “Mami didn’t look like the mother I had tried so hard not to forget during those two and a half years” (70).
2. In this chapter, the children experience a variety of feelings at the reunion with their mother and when they meet Betty. Assuming the role of a psychologist, how would you explain their reactions?
3. What does Reyna discover about her parents and how does it make her feel.
4. Re-read the last passage on page 76. How does this relate to the title of the book? How does this make you feel?

#### **Chapter 11**

1. How does the Mexican economy affect the family?
2. What did La Quinta Castrejon signify for the hierarchy of the town and personally for Reyna’s mother?

## Chapter 12

1. Look at the picture of Reyna's mother on page 84. How does it contrast to the children's environment and to Abuelita Chinta's home on page 75?
2. Discuss the break-up of the Grande parents. Why was it "ironic?"
3. How does immigration affect family dynamics?
4. Read the last two paragraphs of page 90. How has this further complicated Reyna's relationship with her mother and father?
5. What did Carlos discover about their mother and how did this create a source of further conflict for the children?
6. Read page 93. What is your analysis of the mother?

## ***THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US: A MEMOIR* READING GUIDE**

### **Chapters 13 – 16 / Book One**

1. How does their mother's second abandonment affect the children?
2. What is wrong with Carlos and how does the situation illustrate the strategies the poor utilize when formalized health care is lacking?
3. Why is Tío Crece problematic?
4. How and why is Abuelita Chinta a positive force in the children's lives?
5. Why do the floods and their impact frighten Reyna?
6. How does the poverty affect the children psychologically? How do their dreams and the possibility of their fulfillment differ from those of other children?
7. Look at the photos of Abuelita Chinta. What do they reveal?
8. How would you analyze Reyna's mother's character and behavior in Chapter 16?

## MIDTERM PROMPT

There are numerous themes in Reyna Grande's memoir, *The Distance Between Us*, including poverty, education, assimilation, domestic abuse, addiction, immigration, etc. In a 4-5-page argumentative essay, discuss a theme that interested you. Be sure to provide evidence for your claims. Be sure to cite according to the MLA and to include a works cited page.

## MEMOIR PROMPT: STAGE ONE

*The Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines a memoir as “the personal experiences of an author.” Thus, a memoir is autobiographical (the biography of a person narrated by him or herself.)

For Stage One of your memoir, you are being asked to reflect on and write about your own childhood up until age 12. In other words, tell the story of your life up until that point—but that does not mean you have to include every single event. To get you started, think about the following questions: Are there incidents in that early part of your life that were very significant? Are there memories that still stand out for you? How were your experiences similar or different from Reyna Grande’s? Describe in detail using examples. Be sure to have an introduction and thesis statement. Look at how Reyna Grande began her story.

## **PROMPT MEMOIR: STAGE 2**

In the first stage of your memoir, you were asked to write about your life up until age 12.

Now in Stage 2, write about your life from that point through age 18.